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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [FJ](#)

SUBJECT: BRIG.GEN. (RET) KONROTE CONCERNED ABOUT
BAINIMARAMA POLICIES THAT FRUSTRATE ETHNIC-FIJIANS

REF: A. SUVA 013

[¶](#)B. SUVA 005

[¶](#)C. DAO SUVA 220344Z JAN 08

Classified By: Amb. Dinger. Sec. 1.4 (B,D).

Summary

[¶](#)1. (C) George Konrote, well-connected retired soldier, diplomat, and deposed State Minister, is deeply concerned that Fiji interim Prime Minister Bainimarama, his friend, has been listening to poor advice, particularly from Interim Finance Minister Chaudhry and interim Attorney General Sayed-Khaiyum, and has made a series of decisions that were bound to infuriate the ethnic-Fijian community. Konrote noted frustrations within the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF), which stem in part from the same decisions that frustrate the ethnic-Fijian community more broadly. Konrote did not suggest such frustrations will boil into anti-Bainimarama action by the Army, but he left no doubt the frustrations are real. Bainimarama has asked Konrote to be Fiji's Permanent Representative at the UN, but Konrote will decline because of the prospect of Australian and New Zealand visa sanctions against his family. End summary.

Turning down UN role

[¶](#)2. (C) George Konrote, a retired RFMF Brigadier General, a State Minister in the deposed Qarase government, and a former Fiji High Commissioner to Australia, stopped by for a chat on Jan. 23. He is a savvy observer of the Fiji scene, and he retains cordial relations with his military colleagues, including interim PM Bainimarama. Bainimarama has asked Konrote to be Fiji PermRep to the United Nations. Konrote said he has decided to decline the offer because of the threat of Australian and New Zealand visa sanctions which apply to family members. Konrote has two sons who are pilots with Air Pacific and could lose their livelihoods. Konrote said, otherwise, he would be willing to take the job (IG).

Worry about the ethnic-Fijian mood

[¶](#)3. (C) We asked Konrote what the mood is in the public. He expressed great concern about the ethnic-Fijian community, which remains very unhappy about IG policies and relationships. Konrote mentioned in particular recent IG decisions to reform "land" policies, to appoint an Electoral Boundaries Commission with no ethnic-Fijian members, and to consider changing Fiji's constitutionally-entrenched electoral system. (See reftels). He said the "land" issue,

in particular, may stimulate ethnic-Fijians "enough to get them off their butts." Konrote also expressed concern about recent IG moves against Fiji Water and other prominent businesses that will surely affect investor confidence.

Konrote noted a sense that Bainimarama is "listening to the wrong people," in particular to interim Finance Minister Chaudhry and interim Attorney General Sayed-Khaiyum. Konrote observed that the recent interim-Cabinet reshuffle accented those relationships.

RFMF frustrated

¶4. (C) Asked the mood within the RFMF, Konrote indicated that many of his Army colleagues are frustrated. They resent (Navy Commodore) Bainimarama's purge of many of the best and brightest within the Army during the past six years in order to solidify Bainimarama's own position. They resent the insertion of Navy officers in senior roles that "green suits" (Army) should hold. And officers, as ethnic-Fijians, are frustrated by the IG decisions, as noted above, that seem tilted toward the interests of Chaudhry and Sayed-Khaiyum. Konrote speculated that the alleged assassination plot against Bainimarama last November could accurately reflect frustration within the Fijian chiefly community. Konrote did not suggest any moves are afoot within the RFMF to replace Bainimarama, but he left no doubt he believes many Fijians, including Army officers, are deeply frustrated by a number of recent Bainimarama decisions. Konrote clearly believes Bainimarama needs to seek and accept better advice than he has been relying on lately.

DINGER